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DALLAS TIMES HERALD
3 February 1987

Review operation of CIA

THE RESIGNATION of William J. Casey as director of the CIA creates an opportunity for the Reagan administration and the Senate to examine the activities of the intelligence agency in recent years with particular emphasis on its role in secret arms sales to Iran as well as its overall performance.

The administration wisely decided to name a professional to succeed Mr. Casey, who is a long-time friend of President Reagan from California.

However, the appointment of Robert Gates, a 20-year veteran of the CIA and the White House National Security Council under three presidents, should be reviewed carefully by the Senate Intelligence Committee during confirmation hearings later this month. Mr. Gates, who is considered an expert on the Soviet Union, has been operating the agency as deputy director during Mr. Casey's illness.

Mr. Casey, who is recovering from surgery for a brain tumor, resigned his post amid controversy over the role of the CIA in the secret sale of arms to Iran and the diversion of some profits from those sales to buy arms for the contras in Nicaragua.

Despite Mr. Casey's attempt to characterize his role as minimal, a staff report released in January by the Senate Intelligence Committee criticized the director for giving misleading information to the committee last year. Some members of Congress have also been critical of the CIA for failing to abide by legal requirements to inform congressional intelligence oversight committees about the sale of arms to Iran.

Since the mistakes of the CIA are more likely to be publicly aired than its clandestine successes, it will be some time before Mr. Casey's impact on the agency can be fairly judged.

The extent and emphasis of Mr. Gates' participation in CIA policies in recent years is not clear. He received some praise in a book by John Ranelagh, "The Agency: The Rise and Decline of the CIA." Mr. Gates, who returned to the CIA in 1980 from a stint with the National Security Council, was credited with defining an expanded role for the CIA and dealing with some knotty problems, including recruitment of agency operatives, relations with congressional committees, the problem of obtaining reliable information from other nations and the need to broaden the reservoir of intelligence obtained by the CIA.

All of those areas are critical to the successful operation of a revitalized intelligence gathering agency. But a careful look at the CIA's recent history will be necessary in order to focus its role for the future.

Now is an excellent time to conduct such an analysis.

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